

UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

Civil Society Analysis of the 2023 Political Declaration



This briefing note provides a high-level summary of the detailed analysis of the 2023 Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage compared to the Action Agenda from the UHC movement and the 2019 declaration.

The **Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (CSEM)** is the civil society constituency of **UHC2030**, a global partnership to build stronger health systems for universal health coverage (UHC). The CSEM raises civil society voices in UHC2030 to ensure that UHC policies are inclusive and equitable, and that systematic attention is given to the most marginalized and vulnerable populations so that no one is left behind.

In preparation for and during the United Nations (UN) General Assembly High-level Meeting (HLM)

on UHC, the CSEM mobilized civil society to build political momentum for the HLM and ensure action-oriented commitments for resilient and equitable health systems to deliver health for all. The CSEM supported the UHC2030 multi-stakeholder Task Force to develop **the Action Agenda from the UHC movement**, a set of eight action-oriented policy recommendations for countries to prioritize in negotiations for the 2023 Political Declaration (PD) on UHC. The Action Agenda was widely shared with stakeholders, including during the Multi-stakeholder Hearing on UHC on May 9, 2023.

ACTION AGENDA



Action area 1: Champion political leadership for universal health coverage

Political leaders have now experienced how important universal health coverage is to their societies and economies, given their experiences during the pandemic and the ongoing impact of conflicts and climate crisis.



Action area 2: Leave no one behind

Health is enshrined as a fundamental right of every human being, and it is the duty of governments to protect, promote and fulfil the right to health. Countries will benefit economically and socially by investing in health because universal health coverage makes a significant contribution to reducing poverty and promoting equity and social cohesion.



Action area 3: Adopt enabling laws and regulations

Policies, laws and regulations that integrate universal health coverage and health security and create an enabling environment for use of health technologies and innovations will strengthen future economic and social resilience.



Action area 4: Strengthen the health and care workforce to deliver quality health care

The health and care workforce is essential for ensuring healthy people, societies and economies and plays a crucial role during pandemics, conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies. In all situations, women play a prominent role, delivering most frontline essential health and care services.



Action area 5: Invest more, invest better

Universal health coverage is an important foundation for healthy people, societies and economies and makes countries more resilient in health emergencies. Consistent levels of public spending on health are central to progress towards universal health coverage. Primary health care is a critical investment for both universal health coverage and health security.



Action area 6: Move together towards universal health coverage

Governments cannot make progress towards universal health coverage without stakeholders that play a critical role in developing, reviewing and implementing national health policy frameworks.



Action area 7: Guarantee gender equality in health

Gender equality, including equal rights and equal access to services, are critical to achieving universal health coverage and leaving no one behind. Gender equality in the health workforce is a necessary component for achieving universal health coverage.



Action area 8: Connect universal health coverage and health security

Universal health coverage and global health security are intertwined goals anchored in health systems in every country. Leaders must act now to design and resource integrated approaches to support both universal health coverage and prevention, preparedness and response capacities for health emergencies within wider efforts to build equitable, resilient health systems.

The Action Agenda was developed by an inclusive multi-stakeholder Task Force and was informed by a public consultation that gathered 830 responses from over 100 countries. Civil society and communities actively participated in the consultation and their input shaped the Action Agenda.

The 2023 UN HLM on UHC provided a unique opportunity for world leaders to reaffirm their commitment to step up efforts to reinvigorate progress towards UHC and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

The CSEM welcomes the adoption of the 2023 Political Declaration titled *“Universal health coverage: expanding our ambition for health and well-being in a post-COVID world,”* which recommits Member States to make health for all a reality by 2030. Overall the Political Declaration reflects many of the recommendations from across the eight areas of the Action Agenda and strengthens the commitments made in the 2019 Political Declaration in a number of areas.

For a comprehensive look at the final language of the Political Declaration compared to the Action Agenda, and the 2019 declaration, please refer to [our detailed analysis here](#).

Key Takeaways from the 2023 Political Declaration on UHC

The United Nations Member States approved the Political Declaration on UHC on September 21, 2023, and it was subsequently adopted by the UN General Assembly on October 5, 2023. The UN Member States, led by the HLM co-facilitators - the Permanent Representatives of Georgia and Thailand to the UN - under the auspices of the President of the General Assembly, dedicated extensive effort to negotiating the Political Declaration, with input from multi-stakeholder processes, including a Multistakeholder Hearing in preparation of the General Assembly High-level Meeting on UHC on May 8-9, 2023. Many stakeholders, including civil society and communities, also conducted extensive and collaborative advocacy at global, regional, national, and local levels to shape the outcomes in the Political Declaration on UHC.

Overall the Political Declaration reflects many of the recommendations from across the eight areas of the Action Agenda and strengthens the commitments made in the 2019 Political Declaration in a number of areas.

In comparison to the 2019 version, the 2023 Political Declaration on UHC includes stronger language on the fundamental role of primary health care in achieving universal health coverage, and commits countries to ensuring a *“whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach”*.

The declaration elevates communities that health services intend to reach as particularly important stakeholders in achieving UHC, with a recognition of the key role of community-level services. It also includes strong and repeated language on *“community-health workers,”* including on improving their training, development, recruitment and retention, and recognizes the importance of inclusive approaches to health governance for UHC and social participation.

The call for strong political leadership is also included in the Political Declaration. Specifically, the text urges Member States to *“strengthen national efforts, international cooperation and global solidarity at the highest political level to accelerate the achievement of universal health coverage by 2030.”* The document also calls for political leadership to *“strengthen legislative and regulatory frameworks,”* including for enhancing digital health systems. Despite the focus on political leadership, the declaration lacks specific commitments on establishing strong accountability mechanisms, which are key to achieving UHC and ensuring that concrete actions are taken to increase access to quality health services and reduce financial hardship.

The 2023 Political Declaration includes stronger language on financial protection and financing for UHC broadly, and on increased investment in research and development, and digital health compared to the 2019 Political Declaration. Yet, the 2023 Political Declaration lacks concrete actions and funding targets for UHC as called for in the Action Agenda (5% of GDP to be allocated towards health).

The important role of women in the health workforce and the need to empower them, including promoting them to decision making positions, is explicitly recognized in the declaration, as well as the need to engage women and girls in the designing, implementing, and monitoring of health policies.

Additionally, as called for in the Action Agenda, the link between UHC and health security is

formally acknowledged in the 2023 Political Declaration.

However, the 2023 Political Declaration includes weaker language on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in comparison to the 2019 one. And while the declaration repeatedly references the need to ensure access to services for key and vulnerable populations, some populations are left out entirely (such as LGBTQIA+, sex workers, and people in prison).

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Way Forward

On the sidelines of UNGA, the CSEM, in collaboration with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Global Health Council (GHC), held a post-HLM debrief and strategy session with civil society in New York to reflect on the 2023 Political Declaration and identify joint priorities and opportunities to sustain momentum for UHC at national, regional, and global levels. An online post-HLM discussion with civil society was also held on September 29, 2023. The sessions provided civil society with the opportunity to discuss advocacy plans and strategize how to work together to take the outcomes of the HLM forward. Below is a summary of civil society priorities from the discussions:



Translate the commitments into actionable plans at the country level.



Foster and institutionalize the engagement of civil society and communities with decision makers (including parliamentarians) at all levels.



Hold leaders accountable through regular reports on the progress on fulfilling HLM commitments on fulfilling HLM commitments.



Focus on increasing funding for health, including domestic and donor/multilaterals funding, and other innovative financing mechanisms.



Strengthen the role of civil society in social participation, including in knowledge-sharing with decision makers and communities, priority setting, budgeting processes, accountability, and community-led monitoring etc.



Strengthen health data to identify groups left behind, the main reasons for their exclusion and concrete actions to remedy these realities. This includes investing more in research and enhancing data driven platforms to provide evidence-based narratives.



Foster multi-stakeholder collaboration, including by adopting a multi-sectoral approach to tackling cross-cutting issues, by reaching out to stakeholders who work beyond the health sector.



Push policies to improve the working environment for healthcare workers.



Strengthen public campaigns to increase public awareness on UHC and rally more communities and organizations worldwide around the global movement for health for all.

In partnership with stakeholders, the CSEM will continue to coordinate and support civil society advocacy to drive the implementation of the HLM commitments at the country level and hold governments accountable.

Key moments

On December 12, 2023, the global health and international community will use the opportunity of International UHC Day to show solidarity and call on leaders to deliver on their HLM commitments to achieve health for all. The theme of this year's UHC Day is *"Health for All: Time for Action."*

Join us this UHC Day to urge world leaders to put the 2023 Political Declaration on UHC into practice by enacting policies that guarantee equitable access to essential health services without financial hardship and that ensure good health and well-being is not a privilege for a few but a right for all.

CAMPAIGN RESOURCES



- [Home: UHC Day 2023 - Universal Health Coverage Day](#)
- [UHC Day 2023 Toolkit for Frontline Campaigners](#)
- [UHC Day 2023 Substack - sign up to regularly receive information and make sure to stay involved in the campaign.](#)

Resources

Tracking universal health coverage: 2023 Global Monitoring Report (GMR): To track progress on UHC implementation, the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) is published bi-annually by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank. The GMR tracks two SDG UHC indicators: 8.1, which captures the service coverage dimension of UHC (measured using the Service Coverage Index (SCI)); and 8.2, which captures the population exposed to financial hardship due to OOP payments made when using health services (measured by catastrophic and impoverishing health spending). The 2023 GMR shows a disturbing trend of stagnation in the progress towards UHC with nearly 4.5 billion people not covered by essential health services and 2 billion people suffering financial hardship due to out-of-pocket health expenditure. You can access the full report [here](#) and a recording of the report launch [here](#).

In response to the GMR, the CSEM published a **Civil Society Commentary** to highlight civil society perspectives on progress toward UHC and call to action for governments. The Civil Society Commentary is available [here](#).

Findings from 2021 and 2022 Country Consultations on the state of UHC commitment:

The CSEM led 37 civil society consultations across 43 countries as part of the multi-stakeholder [State of the UHC Commitment Review](#). The Review is a political, country-focused and action-oriented tool that complements the more technical and global UHC monitoring report. The consultations captured stories, lived experiences, and perspectives of civil society and communities that show the real progress made toward UHC implementation at the country level. You can access the findings and key recommendations [here](#).

WHA Resolution on social participation: Under the leadership of Thailand and Slovenia, a Core Group of countries is pursuing a resolution on institutionalizing social participation for health and well-being at the WHO Executive Board (EB154) and the World Health Assembly (WHA77). Institutionalizing social participation is crucial for ensuring that health policies and services are responsive to community needs and leaving no one behind. The CSEM has developed an [advocacy brief](#) to guide civil society actions towards building support for the WHA resolution on social participation. The brief provides background information, key advocacy asks and identifies milestones in the lead up to the WHA.